



Inside Google Marketing: What We Learned From Collaborating With Australia's Hilltop Hoods

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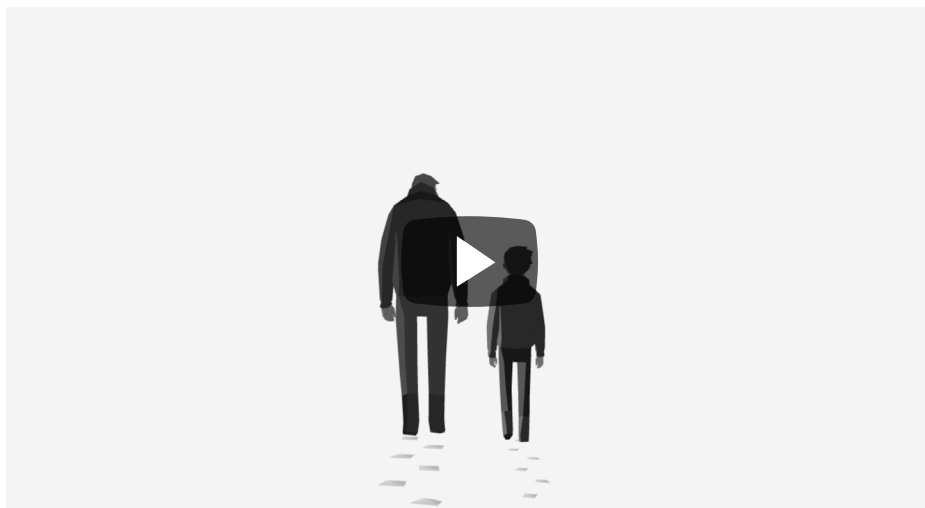
Google Play Music product marketer, Sophie Hirst, shares how her team collaborated with one of Australia's most-loved bands to create a distinctly new, immersive mobile experience.

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When the eight-year-old son of Dan Smith (a.k.a. MC Pressure), underwent treatment for leukemia, the [Hilltop Hoods](#) frontman turned to the world he knows best: music. To capture a world turned upside down by his son's battle, Dan wrote a new song titled "Through The Dark."

The Google Play Music team got involved because we loved the song, but initially we didn't know what form the project would take. We knew that we wanted to be authentic to the artist's vision, push the boundaries of technology, and give fans an immersive experience. Our objective was to demonstrate that Google supports local Aussie artists as well as to help our brand stand out in a competitive music streaming space.

After months of collaboration, we settled on conveying Dan's intensely personal journey through our most personal device: mobile. Together, we created a made-for-mobile interactive film, "[Through The Dark](#)," which allows listeners to tilt and rotate their phones to control their path through two parallel worlds: hope (light) and fear (darkness).



Based on this exhilarating and boundary pushing experience, here are my three key learnings for a successful artist partnership and campaign:

1. Let creators create

In the competitive music space, we knew we had to take a unique approach. We put the band and their vision at the very heart of the brief, instead of taking a standard approach that might introduce the artist or influencers at a much later stage. Why? We knew that creating something their fans would care about meant creating something the artist cares about.

Using technology as our playground as well as organising a series of workshops and hacking sessions, we set about to bring the band's vision to life. The result: a seamlessly flowing interactive film that allowed users navigate their own paths from fear to hope, simply by rotating their mobile devices.

When we went to promote the campaign, we made sure to keep Dan and the band front and center there as well. In fact, ads that opened with Dan [speaking to the camera](#) saw a three point uplift in brand awareness versus ads that didn't open with him.

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2. Push the boundaries of technology

There's nothing particularly new about building a made-for-mobile experience. And interactive music videos have also been done before. So we pushed ourselves to ask, “How are we driving innovation?” and “How can we tell this story in a unique way?”

Our team came up with three guiding principles:

Beyond sight and sound. With the band, we wanted to create an experience that played with senses beyond just sight and sound. We started to explore the territory of a music experience a person can hold in their hands and control, one that makes them felt like they're a part of the song and the journey of the characters in the video.

Immersive over interactive. Interactive experiences can often be distracting or jarring. The challenge was to convey emotion and empathy in such a way that the technology enhanced and enriched the experience and didn't detract from the song. We decided to simplify the level of interactions to just the accelerometer on the phone and a two-world narrative so the user would feel [immersed in and a part of the story](#) as they controlled their view of the dark and light worlds.

Not another app. We didn't want fans to need to download an app that they would only use once or twice and never again. So we pushed ourselves to code the entire film for the mobile web.

Driven entirely by code, the final film is rendered in real time in the mobile browser. To allow users to move between the two worlds, the cameras were mapped onto the mobile device's accelerometer. "Through the Dark" so meticulously renders the two complete worlds so that users can move between them with unprecedented interactivity. Digital technologies were pushed to their limit, [positioning Google Play Music as an innovator in the crowded streaming landscape](#).

3. Draw on something uniquely Aussie

Lastly, we knew we wanted to do something that's uniquely important to Australians. And there's one thing we knew about Aussies: They're hugely patriotic when it comes to music. By teaming up with one of Australia's most-loved artists, we could demonstrate a commitment to local artists and bring Aussie music to life.

To give fans the chance to honour the emotional and personal nature of the project, Google and the band made the the the Hilltop Hoods' latest album available on Google Play Music for free. For each download, \$1 was donated on their behalf to [leading youth cancer organisation CanTeen](#).

Australian fans got behind the "Through the Dark" music experience in a big way. The band and our team were deeply touched by the conversations this project sparked. During the first two weeks of the campaign, we saw a 24-point uplift in social share of voice compared to competitors, 14 million potential social impressions, and almost half a million unique fan engagements with the film experience. Hundreds of people shared personal stories of lives affected by cancer and many more donated money by listening to the album. Best of all, the thousands of dollars raised for [CanTeen](#) helped launch Side of Stage: an initiative conceived by the band to help young Australians living with cancer access live music and meet their favourite artists.



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